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Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, May 22, 2008

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Life in prison for mom

Child killer maintains innocence, but judge cites long-term abuse of her 2-year-old son

By Jameson Cook
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A 27-year-old Warren woman who abused and killed her 2-year-old son maintained her innocence and expressed no remorse before she was ordered to spend the rest of her life in prison.

Crystal Conklin last month was convicted by a jury in Macomb County Circuit Court of felony murder and first-degree child abuse for the June 2007 death of Sean Sowards, who died from a single blunt head strike but showed an alarming amount of evidence of long-term abuse.

"I'm not going to give up fighting this. I'm innocent," Conklin said in the courtroom. "My daughters are still waiting for me. I'm not going to give up."

Judge John Foster immediately countered Conklin.

"You may maintain your innocence, but a jury after listening to testimony found you are not innocent," Foster said from the bench, adding that even if she did not deliver the fatal blow, "There are enough signs and indications of enormous abuse to the feet, toes, eyes and other parts of the body. Anybody who had a chance to observe him should have been moved to take him to emergency care."

Foster sentenced her to a mandatory term of life in prison without a chance for parole, plus a concurrent term of nine years for the child abuse.

Conklin's defense attorney, Ronald Goldstein, said after the verdict his client is remorseful about the incident but believes she is innocent. He said he advised her not to verbalize remorse in court.

"She plans to appeal," Goldstein said, declining to elaborate.

Elizabeth Herd, Sean's paternal grandmother, called Conklin's innocence claim "disgusting" and "delusional."

"Desperate people do desperate things," she said.

Conklin has a 4-year-daughter and a daughter who was born last July while she was housed in the Macomb County Jail. The two girls are in foster care and likely will be adopted. The parental rights of the father, Michael Sowards, have been terminated and he is charged with second-degree child abuse for failing to detect or report abuse. He faces circuit court arraignment next week on the charge.

Michael Sowards after the sentencing said the sentence is "justice for my son" but added, "I wish Michigan had the death penalty."

Sean died two days after he was brought to a hospital in a comatose state when Michael Sowards said he first arrived at the Jarvis Street home to find his son unresponsive and lying next to vomit. In addition, Sean's big toenails were torn off, and he had dozens of bruises, cuts and abrasions all over his body, and a fracture. Showing cloudy eyes, he was virtually blind from repeated abuse, officials said.

Conklin blamed the father, Michael Sowards, 31, with whom she lived. During the trial, she claimed for the first time since her arrest that the father arrived home from work about 4:15 p.m. and went into Sean's room for several minutes before leaving a short time later.

But the prosecution dismissed her claim. Besides being one of her multiple versions of what happened, it still meant she never responded until Michael Sowards came home three hours later.

She also claimed that she never reported abuse because Michael Sowards abused her.

During the sentencing, Herd gave an emotional statement castigating Conklin and expressing her despair for her grandson, whose "sweet baby cheeks" she missed kissing and his "giggle" she missed hearing.

Wiping away tears, Herd said Conklin betrayed her, conning her into caring for her.

"For all the time I have known you, I mistook you for someone with heart," she said. "But your greatest betrayal was to Sean, this pure, innocent, sweet and loving little soul who completely loved, trusted and depended on you, his mother, to protect and love him. You were his life Crystal. ... And you hurt him, in all and every way unimaginable to a mother."

Her son, Michael Sowards, was "manipulated" by Conklin, she said.

Herd hadn't seen Sean for more than a year prior his death as Conklin shielded Sean from his father's family, she said.

Herd said the tragedy has inspired her to campaign for child abuse victims. She has a MySpace page dedicated to Sean and battling child abuse called "Sean's Voice."

Herd also faulted Child Protective Services workers within the Department of Human Services for failing to dig deeper into "numerous" complaints starting when Sean was 4 months old. A DHS employee testified that of four complaints, two resulted in investigations that did not uncover significant abuse.

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http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/052208/loc_local03.shtml

Thursday, May 22, 2008

Grandmother says daughter-in-law who fatally injured son was a 'monster'

Edward L. Cardenas / The Detroit News

WARREN -- The paternal grandmother of a 2 1/2 -year-old boy who was killed last year by his mother compared the child's mother to a "monster" who purposely hid his injuries before inflicting a head injury that led to his death.

"Your greatest betrayal was to Sean, this pure innocent sweet and loving little soul who completely loved, trusted and depended on you, his mother, to protect and love him," a tearful Elizabeth Herd told Crystal Conklin on Wednesday. "You were his life, Crystal. His whole world, his everything and you hurt him."

Herd said she had been told that her grandson may have been autistic or have had some other affliction.

"The whole time he spent here in this short pain-filled life, his only problem, his only affliction, was having a hateful, heartless monster as his mother," Herd said.

Sean Sowards died June 13. Conklin, whose eyes were red and appeared to have shed tears, said very little before she was sentenced to life in prison by Judge John Foster on a charge of felony murder. She also was convicted by a Macomb County jury April 24 of first-degree child abuse, to which Foster sentenced her to up 15 years in prison that she will serve concurrently with her life sentence.

Just before sentencing, the 28-year-old woman gave a short statement.

"I am not going to give up fighting this," she said. "I am innocent."

Her attorney, Ronald Goldstein, said that his client intends to appeal the verdict.

The charges stem from an incident June 11 after the toddler was taken to the hospital by his father, who came home from work and found his son unresponsive. Doctors found that he had more than 40 bruises across his body along with eye injuries and scarring on his toes. Conklin, who was pregnant when the abuse occurred, was charged with murder following his death. Conklin's other two children are in foster care.

Conklin's ex-boyfriend and father of the three children, Michael Sowards, is facing second-degree child abuse charges in Sean Sowards' death.

Following the sentencing, he did not speak about the charges facing him, but he did discuss the sentencing against Conklin.

"I wanted justice for my son," said Sowards. "It's too bad Michigan doesn't have the death penalty."

You can reach Edward L. Cardenas at (586) 468-0529 or ecardenas@detnews.com.

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Mother Sentenced In Death Of Toddler Son

Mother Gets Life Behind Bars For Death Of Her 2-Year-Old Child

POSTED: 5:11 pm EDT May 21, 2008
UPDATED: 5:50 pm EDT May 21, 2008

WARREN, Mich. -- A 27-year-old Warren woman has been sentenced to life in prison without parole for first-degree murder in the death of her 2-year-old son.

Macomb County Circuit Court Judge John Foster also sentenced Crystal Tamara Conklin to nine to 15 years in prison for first-degree child abuse.

The sentences will run concurrently.

A jury had found Conklin guilty last month.

Michael Sowards had returned home from work last June 11 to find their son, Sean, unresponsive.

Sean Sowards was treated for a closed-head injury and died two days later at a local hospital.

Investigators have said the boy had a fractured femur, two missing toenails and bruises all over his body.

Michael Sowards is being charged with child abuse in a separate case.

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Muskegon Chronicle

Meth lab busted near school

Thursday, May 22, 2008

By Lisa Medendorp

lmedendorp@muskegonchronicle.com

MUSKEGON -- Two suspects have been charged with operating a methamphetamine lab near Muskegon's Marquette Elementary School.

Narcotics officers from the West Michigan Enforcement Team raided 1266 James late Monday night, according to the Muskegon County Prosecutor's Office.

Assistant Prosecutor Marc E. Curtis said police found the meth lab in a garden shed behind the house. The highly addictive drug "was in the process of being cooked when the raid took place," Curtis said.

The manufacture of methamphetamine can involve dangerous and potentially explosive substances.

Curtis said the home was found to be "in total disarray," and that items for manufacturing methamphetamine were found "all over the house."

The sister of one of the occupants of the James Street home and her boyfriend were arrested, Curtis said. The two were arraigned Wednesday in 60th District Court.

Patrick James Rowley, 32, of Sparta, and Dana Denio, 27, who told a judge she was homeless, are charged with operating or maintaining a lab involved with methamphetamine; the delivery/manufacture of methamphetamine; and operating or maintaining a methamphetamine lab within 500 feet of a school or house. All the charges are 20-year felonies.

Police said Denio has been living at 1266 James with her sister.

Rowley also has been charged as a habitual offender. Authorities said he has past convictions in Kent County for assault with a dangerous weapon, malicious destruction of property and larceny in a building.

Judge Michael J. Nolan set bail at \$250,000 each and preliminary examination for June 4.

Curtis said Denio's sister, Dawn Kelley, who lives at 1266 James, was arrested on a Friend of the Court warrant. Curtis said an infant was removed from the residence and has been placed in foster care.

Although the raid took place late Monday, police still were on the scene well into Tuesday morning. An investigation by WEMET is continuing.

The materials used in the manufacture of methamphetamine are classified as toxic waste. A State Police hazardous materials team was called in to dispose of the materials found on James Street.

Fewer than a dozen methamphetamine labs have been uncovered in Muskegon County since 1999, when law enforcement officials began dealing with a proliferation of the clandestine labs in West Michigan.

Since then, most labs have been found in Barry, Allegan, Van Buren and Kalamazoo counties. "Rolling" labs also have been found in vehicles.

One of the earliest local meth lab discoveries also was near Marquette Elementary School. In March 2002, WEMET officers and Muskegon police raided a former grocery store at 1209 Marquette, across Roberts

Street from the school. No arrests were made locally in that case.

Other meth labs have since been found in Fruitport, Blue Lake and Casnovia townships and in Muskegon Heights.

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Oakland County prosecutors hand off controversial Perry case

By ANN ZANIEWSKI
Of The Oakland Press

Livingston County prosecutors hope to decide within a month whether James Perry, an Oak Park kindergarten teacher accused of molesting two young boys, will face a third trial.

Local prosecutors requested that another office handle the matter because of a grievance filed against Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca related to statements he made about the case.

"Based upon the pending grievance against Mr. Gorcyca, it was the wisest thing to do to avoid any appearance of impropriety," Oakland County Chief Deputy Prosecutor Deborah Carley said.

Perry has been accused of pulling two boys, ages 4 and 5, out of a lunch line at Oak Park's Key Elementary School in 2005.

He was convicted of the charges in 2006, but a new trial was ordered when it came to light that there were potentially important witnesses not interviewed by detectives.

Perry's second trial ended in April in a mistrial when the jury, reportedly split 11-1 in favor of acquittal, could not reach a unanimous verdict.

Livingston County Prosecutor David Morse said his office received the case about a week ago.

He said prosecutors are in the process of reviewing five boxes of documents, and hope to make a determination about the course of the case within 30 days.

"We're looking at this with a blank slate," Morse said.

Hearings will still be held in Oakland County before Circuit Judge Denise Langford-Morris. Oakland County will cover the costs incurred by the prosecution.

Robyn Frankel, one of Perry's two defense attorneys, said Gorcyca made the right decision in seeking a special prosecutor.

"It's better that he take a step away, and give it to someone who is in an objective position, so no one can ever say that he made a decision to proceed or not to proceed based on some personal agenda," Frankel said.

The Michigan Attorney Grievance Commission has alleged that Gorcyca may have prejudiced Perry's legal proceedings by calling him a "freak" in a newspaper interview, referring to him as a pedophile in a radio interview and making other statements about the case.

Frankel said she strongly believes that Perry should not be tried a third time.

"It wasn't appropriately investigated from the get-go," she said.

"The testimony and evidence discovered after the initial conviction supports a finding that it (the allegations) can't be proved beyond a reasonable doubt."

Perry remains on a paid suspension from the Oak Park School District while the criminal case is pending.

The Livingston County assistant prosecutor now on the case is Pamela Maas, a former Oakland County prosecutor who handles Livingston's sex crime cases.

A pre-trial is set for this morning before Langford-Morris.

Contact staff writer Ann Zaniewski at (248) 745-4628 or ann.zaniewski@oakpress.com.

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May 22, 2008

Gorcyca recuses himself from teacher sex case

New prosecutor to start after recusal

BY JOHN WISELY and L.L. BRASIER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

Former Oak Park kindergarten teacher James Perry, charged with raping two young boys at school, is to appear in Livingston County court today because Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca has recused himself from the case.

Gorcyca recused himself after being charged with professional misconduct for his handling of it -- namely calling Perry a freak and publicly discussing evidence that was ruled inadmissible at trial.

A Livingston County prosecutor must now decide whether to pursue a third trial against Perry, or drop the case. That decision could come today.

"I hope they take a good, objective look at this case and not go forward," said defense attorney Robyn Frankel.

Gorcyca's chief deputy, Deb Carley, did not respond to an e-mail seeking information on the prosecutor's decision to recuse himself. Gorcyca sought a special prosecutor in the case because of the ethics case, said Rusty Hills, spokesman for state Attorney General Mike Cox.

"Given that the grievance is specifically about this case, he really has to make sure he has nothing to do with it anymore," said Peter Henning, a law professor at Wayne State University. Perry was charged with assaulting two boys at Key Elementary School in Oak Park in October 2005. In September 2006, an Oakland County jury convicted him, but a second trial ended with a hung jury April 1.

Contact **L.L. BRASIER** at 248-858-2262 or lbrasier@freepress.com.



May 22, 2008

Perry trial decision set for August

By *L.L. BRASIER*
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

James Perry, the former Oak Park schoolteacher accused of sexually assaulting two small boys in a special education room in October 2005, will have to wait until August to learn if he will face yet another trial.

Perry was convicted in 2006 of raping the two boys, but a judge threw out the case when she learned that police never interviewed the three teachers in the room, all who say the room was never empty. A second trial earlier this year ended in a hung jury, with 11 of the 12 jurors voting to acquit.

Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca recused himself from the case earlier this year because he faces ethics charges for his handling of the matter. A special prosecutor from Livingston County, appointed by the state attorney general's office, appeared in Oakland County Circuit Court today and asked for a 90-day extension so she can review court records.

The special prosecutor can decide to drop the case, or determine that there is enough evidence to take Perry to trial again. Perry faces up to life in prison if convicted.

Judge Denise Langford Morris set a Aug. 21 court date. Perry remains free on personal bond and lives with family members.

Thursday, May 22, 2008

Livingston prosecutor given 90 days to decide on Perry trial

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

PONTIAC -- An Oakland Circuit Court judge gave a newly appointed prosecutor until later this summer to determine whether she wants to go forward with a third trial for an ex-kindergarten teacher charged with an October 2005 sexual assault of two boys in an Oak Park elementary school.

Judge Denise Langford Morris said Thursday there was "good cause" to approve Livingston County assistant prosecuting attorney Pamela Maas's request for 90 days so she can obtain a transcript of the last trial for James Norman Perry.

The matter was passed on to Livingston County after Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca recused his office of handling it because of a pending grievance against him.

"I came into work on Monday and found five boxes of court files in my office," said Maas. "It will take some time to review all the material."

Perry, 34, of Ferndale was not in court Thursday and remains free on bond. He was convicted in a first trial in 2006, but had the verdict overturned before sentencing. His second trial ended in a hung jury last month. Perry is charged with two counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and two counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct in an alleged incident nearly three years ago at Key Elementary School in Oak Park involving two boys, aged 4 and 5 years old.

Gorcyca initially was to make a decision on a third trial. But he was targeted for an attorney grievance probe because of statements he allegedly made to a newspaper editor, in a radio interview and in a press release after Perry's first

conviction on the charges. The complaint alleges Gorcyca made statements that could have "had a substantial likelihood" of prejudicing court proceedings.

Gorcyca, whose term as prosecutor expires this year, has declined comment on the complaint other than a written statement that he looks forward to defending himself "in front of the proper tribunal." A majority vote of the tribunal is needed to substantiate charges and penalties can range from reprimand to disbarment.

You can reach Mike Martindale at (248) 647-7226 or mmartindale@detnews.com.



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Teen arrested for rape

Male student charged with assault at high school

By Catherine Kavanaugh
Daily Tribune Staff Writer

ROYAL OAK -- A 16-year-old student was arrested Tuesday and accused of raping a 15-year-old girl on the top of a stairway at Royal Oak High School.

Police said the suspect put his hand over the girl's mouth so she couldn't yell for help and then dragged her up to the landing of the set of stairs at about 11:40 a.m.

"It's a rarely used stairwell," Lt. Corrigan O'Donohue said. "He pulled her up to the landing on top and he raped her."

The girl told a friend and together they reported the incident to school authorities.

"The suspect was arrested at the scene and taken to Children's Village," O'Donohue said. "He's being charged as a juvenile."

Police filed a petition to charge the suspect with third-degree criminal sexual conduct, which involves penetration. Detective Cynthia Hill said he waived his right to a hearing Tuesday and a juvenile court referee set bond at \$50,000/10 percent, which means he could be released if \$5,000 is posted.

If convicted, the teen could be confined to a juvenile detention facility until he is 21. Also, he would have to register as a sex offender, Hill said.

Police said both the suspect and victim live in Royal Oak.

This is the third criminal sexual conduct incident at ROHS, according to O'Donohue. In February, a 17-year-old female student, who is considered an adult, was arrested for performing oral sex on a 14-year-old boy in a girl's restroom. The other case involved minors who engaged in mutually consensual sex at the school. The age of consent is 16.

Contact Catherine Kavanaugh at cathy.kavanaugh@dailytribune.com or (248) 591-2504.

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Leslie teen pleads no contest in beating

Midday update

KEVIN GRASHA • LANSING STATE JOURNAL • MAY 22, 2008 •
FROM LSJ.COM

UPDATED 12:40 P.M. Why Jarod Anthony Marshall viciously beat a 14-year-old girl until she was unconscious remains unknown, even after he pleaded no contest today to the attack.

Wearing a green jail uniform with his hands shackled, Marshall pleaded no contest to assault with intent to maim for the Jan. 8 attack on Mary Pulliam as she walked to school - apparently a complete stranger to him.

The Leslie High School freshman suffered injuries including a fractured skull and continues to recover, said her mother, Debra Pulliam.

“We’re going to be dealing with this for her entire life,” she said after the hearing.

As part of an agreement with prosecutors, Marshall, 16, of Leslie, will serve 10 to 12 months in jail and then be placed on probation for four years.

Marshall, who also was a Leslie High School student, was convicted as an adult. A sentencing hearing is scheduled for June 18.

Ingham County Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield read from police reports that seemed to depict a random attack.

As Mary Pulliam walked to school, her backpack strapped around both shoulders, Marshall followed behind her, grabbed the backpack and struck her “at least three times in the head and face,” Manderfield said, reading from a report.

“(He) said he did not know her name at the time.”

When Marshall let go of the backpack, she fell to the ground “without using her arms or her hands” to brace herself, Manderfield said.

“He said he didn’t say anything,” Manderfield continued, “He simply walked away from the victim... He stated that he believed she was badly hurt.”

The attack happened on a path leading from Leslie Middle School to the high school, near the football field.

Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III said the plea deal ensured that Marshall, who was 15 when the attack happened, would serve some jail time and then be monitored by the court for an additional four years. If he violates probation, he could go to prison.

“There was a lot of uncertainty if we had gone to trial,” Dunnings said. “If he was found guilty of a lesser offense, then he could have been sentenced as a juvenile, which means the court’s jurisdiction would have ended within a couple of years.”

Dunnings added that, as a juvenile, Marshall may not have received any jail time.

Read more on this report in Friday’s Lansing State Journal.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.



THE BAY CITY TIMES

Helen M. Nickless Volunteer Clinic receives \$22,439 grant

Thursday, May 22, 2008

Times Staff

The Helen M. Nickless Volunteer Clinic in Hampton Township is one of 42 free clinics across the state that will share \$1 million in grants from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan.

Blue Cross Blue Shield announced Tuesday that the clinic, 1454 W. Center Road, will receive \$22,439.

"The demand is growing every month," said Joyce Hardy, manager of the Nickless clinic and president of Free Clinics of Michigan. "These are people who are not getting preventive care and are delaying much-needed treatment for life threatening illnesses."

Lynda Rossi, of Blue Cross Blue Shield, said free clinics deliver vital services to residents who otherwise might not have access to health care.

While financial support is critical to keeping the Nickless clinic running, so too are volunteers, Hardy said.

She recently put out a call for licensed medical practitioners willing to donate their time at the clinic.

She said volunteer practitioners are needed to see patients and she also welcomes any doctor, physicians assistant, nurse practitioner or pharmacist who wishes to volunteer.

The clinic is only open on Wednesday evenings. To volunteer, call

895-4664.

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THE BAY CITY TIMES

Health Plan official: 'A petition drive is not going to work'

Thursday, May 22, 2008

By Ryan J. Stanton

rstanton@bc-times.com | 894-9645

Linda Hamacher, executive director of the Bay Health Plan, on Wednesday dismissed the idea that a petition drive should be the way to get a health care tax proposal on the Nov. 4 ballot in Bay County.

"I don't imagine that the board of the Health Plan would choose to spend its health care dollars on a petition drive," she said. "We don't have the resources to do a petition drive and it would not be fair to the members that we currently have to spend money on a petition drive."

Essexville resident Scott Wittbrodt earlier this week suggested it should be a citizen-led drive, not action of the County Board, that places the question on the fall ballot.

Hamacher is asking county commissioners to use their authority to approve putting a 0.67-mill tax request on the ballot, forgoing the need for a petition drive.

Either way, the millage would require a popular vote in November.

"A petition drive would allow citizens to find out about what this millage has to offer," Wittbrodt said. "A large group of citizens who have signed a petition to have this millage placed on the ballot is of greater value than any amount of graphs, flow charts, numbers or percentages that can be put together."

Hamacher says if she knew for sure the tax would be on the ballot, she could spend the summer educating the public, "but we don't have the time to do a petition drive, and to raise money for the campaign and to adequately educate the people in the county about the millage proposal, so a petition drive is not going to work."

Petitions to place questions on the November ballot must be filed by Aug. 12. Otherwise, the County Board has until Aug. 26 to set ballot wording on any proposal it decides to put forward.

County officials said they would have to calculate how many signatures would be required if petitions are pulled.

Commissioner Donald J. Tilley, 9th District, said he would prefer that supporters of the millage organize a petition drive. He said it would give a better indication of whether voters are willing to pay a new tax - albeit a small one - during hard economic times.

"If they could go out and collect the signatures from the public and get the measure on the ballot, then I think that's the public's will versus putting pressure on the commission," he said.

The proposed tax would raise an estimated \$2 million a year to provide health care programs for the low-income uninsured of Bay County. It would cost the owner of a \$100,000 home about \$33.50 a year in taxes.

Commissioners plan to take up the issue at 9 a.m. June 10 inside the commission chambers on the fourth floor of the County Building, 515 Center Ave.

Skip to content

Farm bill stalled

By From staff and wire reports

The State News

Published: May 21, 2008

The U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly rejected President George W. Bush's veto of a roughly \$307 billion farm bill, but what should have been a stinging defeat for Bush became an embarrassing episode for Democrats. Only hours before the House's 316-108 vote, Bush had vetoed the five-year measure, saying it was too expensive and gave too much money to wealthy farmers when farm incomes are high. Only hours later, the House voted 316-108 to override the veto, and the Senate had been expected to quickly follow suit.

But action stalled after it was discovered that Congress had omitted a 34-page section of the massive bill when it sent the measure to the White House. That means Bush vetoed a different bill than Congress approved, leaving leaders scrambling to figure out whether it could become law.

Michigan, second only to California in specialty crop production, needs the money for blueberry, apple and asparagus crops, said Jeff Oesterle, president of the Ingham County Farm Bureau. These crops are involved in the farm bill's new programs to supply 81,000 students in Michigan schools with fresh fruits and vegetables.

If the bill, officially known as the 2008 Food, Conservation and Energy Act, is passed, MSU agriculture and science departments may look forward to more funding for research and nutrition programs.

Brian Graff, farm manager of Agronomy Farm, said one aspect of the project that could be receiving money from the farm bill would be research on bioenergy crops. This includes work with corn, grains, corn stalks and switchgrass in attempts to harvest and use ethanol from the plants.

"It's exciting, the idea of getting additional expenditures for crops and alternative cropping systems," said John Hoben, a crop and soil sciences graduate student.

Hoben also said that some government support would be better than none at all.

Another use of the funds would be finding alternative energy and fuel sources.

Krishnamurthy Jayaraman, a chemical engineering and material science professor,



Nick Dentamaro

The State News

Tim Boring, a doctorate student in soil sciences specializing in soil fertility, drives a tractor planting seeds for an experiment dealing with the corn rootworm and other corn pests.



Nick Dentamaro

The State News

Graduate student Tim Boring, right, pours corn seed into a hopper as farm manager Brian Graff holds open the lid. Boring is working on an experiment about corn rootworm and other corn pests. Boring will plant four varieties of corn seed in the same plot to study the results.

By the numbers

\$230 million dollars would be given to specialty crop research

said he is researching solar panels to increase efficiency in gathering solar energy, another useful resource in times of high fuel prices.

The farm bill initially passed both the House and the Senate by veto-proof majorities last week, 316-108 and 81-15, respectively.

Despite Bush’s vote against the changes, supporters remain hopeful.

“It is what it is,” said David Schweikhardt, a professor from the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics. “On the one hand there will be higher tax payer costs with this bill, but on the other hand, with higher food prices, the extra money, especially for nutrition, is needed.”

Schweikhardt said he testified in support of the bill before the House Committee of Agriculture in July 2007.

Local politicians support the bill because of its focus on alternative energy.

“It not only impacts food supply, but also our national security in being independent of overseas oil,” said Sylvia Warner, spokeswoman for U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Brighton.

“Every element of our lives is tied up in how we generate and use energy,” said Warner. “So one of the most important pieces of our future is being able to provide that fuel.”

Other allotments in the farm bill are for food and nutrition programs. Food stamp programs also will see an increase of \$7.8 billion dollars.

Dave Carr, director of the Mid-Michigan Food Bank, said the aide the bill could provide would encourage farmers and therefore help the bank support Michigan families better.

“You have to have food to give away,” Carr said. “Someone’s got to grow the food — it gives incentives to farmers. To me it shouldn’t be controversial, it’s just the government’s way of helping people.”

Kristin Moretto, director of the MSU Food Bank, said the bank also could benefit from increased funding.

“We have had an increase in clients, not a huge one, but an increase,” said Moretto. “(The economy) has an impact in the availability of food, and we have to be creative with where else we can get food from to give our clients, and that costs more money.”

Maureen Sorbet, spokeswoman for Michigan’s Department of Human Services, said her department’s food stamp case load was at an all-time high this year, and has more than doubled since the 2000 school year.

“Our clients could benefit from higher food assistance benefit levels because of the cost of food,” Sorbet said.

Matt Williams, deputy press secretary for U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., said the farm bill is poorly worded in saying all of an additional \$10 billion dollars is going exclusively to nutrition and food programs.

throughout the country

81,000 students in Michigan schools would be getting more fresh fruits and vegetables

\$7.8 billion increase would be given to food stamp funding

17 approximate months the bill has been in process of passing

\$1.3 billion would be used for wetlands conservation and defense

Source: House Committee on Agriculture

Possibly related:

Homeless veterans receive aid

Shuttle bus service helps student travel

Mich. celebrates heritage month, embraces culture

Quarterbacks shuffle for MSU football

Farm Lane construction expands

“In this case nutrition includes food assistance, as well as farmers markets and business,” Williams said. “This includes going into the specialty crops grown in Michigan for school food programs.”

Oesterle said he felt the farm bill didn’t provide for Michigan farming like it should.

“It’s not going to make as much of a difference as a lot of people thought,” said Oesterle.

“But the expansion in customary crops will be a big benefit.”

The farm bill also addresses the Great Lakes, which will receive funding for clean up and conservation of wetlands if the bill is passed.

“Agriculture is Michigan’s second largest industry,” Warner said.

“Whatever the farm bill holds, we just want to make sure it stays vibrant, strong and growing — no pun intended.”

Staff writers Joy Walter and Nich Wolak contributed to this report.

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Karen Cassidy
The State News

Tracy Martincic describes how she wants her hair cut to a volunteer at the 5th annual Capital Area Homeless Veterans Stand Down on the lawn of the Michigan Hall of Justice Wednesday morning. Martincic, who is currently homeless, came with fiancé Steve Maxim, a veteran of the Iraq War.

Homeless veterans receive aid

By [Marilyn King](#)
The State News

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Tracy Martincic said she did not choose to be homeless. Her fiancé, Iraq war veteran Steve Maxim, did not choose to be homeless either.

These situations, Martincic said, are often misunderstood.

Martincic and Maxim were among more than 200 homeless and disabled veterans and non-veterans at Wednesday's fifth annual Capital Area Stand Down for Homeless Veterans in downtown Lansing.

Attendees were provided with several free services including medical aid, haircuts and food on the lawn of the Michigan Hall of Justice.

“We’re not all drunks or drug addicts,” Martincic said. “You get in certain situations in your life where you have to start over, and if you don’t have a family or support, it’s kind of hard.”

In a given year, there are 3,200 homeless people in Lansing, said Patrick Patterson, vice president of operations in Lansing for Volunteers of America. On average, one in four of the homeless are veterans, he said.

“Homelessness is a complex problem,” Patterson said. “It represents a failure on our part to take care of our obligation to those who served.”

Last week, David Lloyd Melvin, a homeless man, was murdered in a five-acre lot behind a Volunteers of America building near downtown Lansing. A homeless couple have been charged in connection with his death.

Patterson said clients and staff are still mourning the death of a man that many knew personally.

“Nobody likes to lose someone, although frankly it’s not that surprising,” Patterson said. “The streets are very dangerous.”

Michigan State police Officer Ed Barrett said the event brought awareness of the severity of homelessness to the residents of Lansing.

“It makes the city of Lansing understand the homeless population and that most of them are veterans,” he said.

For veterans, the risk of homelessness is especially high, Barrett said.

“People get out of the military and don’t know what to do with their lives,” Barrett said. “They end up getting in a jam and end up being homeless.”

Volunteers of America is currently working on expanding its services into Metro Detroit and possibly Kalamazoo.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office reported in September that there are as many as 196,000 homeless veterans in the country.

East Lansing police Lt. Kevin Daley said students in the East Lansing area treat the homeless population with respect.

“The students are generous in providing shelter and money,” Daley said.
“They are not harassed or bothered.”

Last year, a city ordinance was passed prohibiting individuals from loitering in parking structures, but Daley said they do not generally have to take legal actions against the homeless in the area.

“A lot of them are here just to pick up the bottles, make some money, and go on their way,” he said.

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Stores, agencies adopt holiday hours

Monroe News

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Many stores and offices will be closed or have reduced hours Monday, Memorial Day.

Banks - All banks and credit unions will be closed Monday.

Bus service - Lake Erie Transit buses will not run Monday.

Garbage pickup - The Monroe Department of Public Services will be closed Monday. ABC Refuse will collect trash as normal all week. Most other companies will collect trash a day later than scheduled next week.

Government agencies - All township, village and city offices will be closed Monday. Also closed Monday will be the Monroe County Courthouse, **Department of Human Services**, Monroe County Road Commission and Secretary of State branches.

Grocery stores - Most stores will be open regular hours Monday.

Libraries - All branches of the Monroe County Library System will be closed Monday. Milan Public Library will be closed Saturday through Monday. Flat Rock Public Library will be closed Sunday and Monday.

Mail - No mail will be delivered, and U.S. post offices will be closed Monday. The lobby at the Monroe Post Office will remain open for picking up box mail.

Newspaper - The Monroe Evening News offices will closed Monday. The paper will be delivered Monday morning.

Other agencies - The Monroe Family YMCA and United Way of Monroe County will be closed Monday.

Retail stores - Sav-A-Lot will close at 5 p.m. Monday. Frenchtown Square mall and Elder-Beerman will close at 6 p.m. Monday. Kohl's will close at 9 p.m. Monday. Kmart, Sears, Target and Wal-Mart will have regular hours Monday.

Travel centers - The Travel Information Center on US-23 will be open from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. all weekend and continue that schedule daily all summer.